EDITOR'S COMMENTS ■

The Timeliness of Publications in *MIS Quarterly* ■

What is an appropriate "lead time" for the publication of research in a journal? By "lead time," I am referring to the time from a manuscript's entering the review process at a journal, to the time of the manuscript's publication.

At *MIS Quarterly,* the "first round" in the review process averages about four months. At the end of the first round, some manuscripts survive to enter the revise-and-resubmit cycle. Depending on the number of such cycles, an editor's decision to accept a manuscript for publication could take place a year or two after the time the author first submitted the manuscript. Then, given the backlog of other accepted manuscripts already waiting to appear in print, more time can elapse until the accepted manuscript finally appears in print. At *MIS Quarterly,* does such a lead time cause the research to become outdated?

One of two key considerations in answering this question is the sort of research that *MIS Quarterly* publishes. In the June 1995 issue of *MIS Quarterly,* the previous editor-in-chief, Bob Zmud, stated the following in his Editor's Comments: "The editorial objective of the *Quarterly* has been and will continue to be the development and communication of knowledge concerning both the management of information technology and the use of information technology for managerial and organizational purposes." In other words, this refers to the fact that *MIS Quarterly* is an information systems journal, not a technology journal. For an information systems journal, a lead time of a year or even two can be reasonable.

Research about information technology itself can sometimes be outdated quickly—in a year, if not months. However, theory and research about the *management of* information technology or the *use* of information technology *for managerial and organizational purposes* has a longer life. Information technologies can come and go, but my belief is that the lessons (both theory-oriented and practice-oriented) that we, in our roles as scholars, strive for are constant across technologies. (I say this to my students all the time.)

Along these lines, I recall reading something that Gerry DeSanctis wrote (1993, p. 98) about group support systems: "Why is the study of GSS an important research area? My own view of this issue is that GSSs are not so interesting in their own right as they are a new opportunity for studying old questions about the role of technology in organizations." New information technologies are necessarily new for only a brief time, but the lessons we learn from them about the role of technology in organizations will endure, if they are good lessons.

Research that *MIS Quarterly* publishes, in not being about information technology itself but about the *management of* information technology and the *use of information technology,* has stood the test of time. Let's look at three examples:

1977: "MIS Problems and Failures: A Socio-Technical Perspective Part I: The Causes" by Robert P. Bostrom and J. Stephen Heinen. Bostrom and Heinen's lessons remain timely, even though the information technologies we deal with today were never even anticipated in 1977. This is because Bostrom and Heinen's paper was not about information technology. Rather, it was about the *management of* information technology and the *uses of* information technology *for managerial and organizational purposes.* Their 1977 paper still explains management-of-IT-in-organizational-settings phenomena in 1999. If Bostrom and Heinen's paper had experienced a lead time of a year or two, its timeliness was not hurt.

1993: "CASE Tools as Organizational Change: Investigating Incremental and Radical Changes in Systems Development" by Wanda Orlikowski. In my reading of it, this paper is not about CASE technology per se; It is about the *management of* CASE technology. Consider the abstract: "The paper thus has important implications

for research and practice. Specifically, the framework and findings suggest that in order to account for the experiences and outcomes associated with CASE tools, researchers should consider the social context of systems development, the intentions and actions of key players, and the implementation process followed by the organization. Similarly, the paper suggests that practitioners will be better able to manage their organizations' experiences with CASE tools, if they understand that such implementations involve a process of organizational change over time, and not merely the installation of a new technology." Replace "CASE tools" with another technology ("ERP" would be a tempting choice), and the lessons in Orlikowski's paper (pertaining to "the social context of systems development, the intentins and actions of key players, and the implementation process followed by the organization") remain constant. Today, CASE tools are hardly a new technology. However, Orlikowski's research remains timely. If *MIS Quarterly* had published this paper in 1994 or 1995, instead of 1993, it would have retained all its significance and timeliness.

1996: "Productivity, Business Profitability, and Consumer Surplus: Three Different Measures of Information Technology Value" by Lorin M. Hitt and Erik Brynjolfsson. In the conclusion section of their paper, Hitt and Brynjolfsson state: "Of equal importance, we separated the issue of IT value into three dimensions: the effect of IT on productivity, the effect of IT on business profitability, and the effect of IT on consumer surplus. Our empirical examination confirmed that, like any multidimensional object, IT's value can look different depending on the vantage point chosen. While we found evidence that IT may be increasing productivity and consumer surplus but not necessarily leading to supranormal business profits, we also showed that there is no inherent contradiction in the idea that IT can create value but destroy profits." If *MIS Quarterly* had published this paper in 1997 or 1998, instead of 1996, the research notion of separating IT value into three dimensions would hardly have lost any of its relevance.

The second key factor in determining whether a particular lead time for the publication of research papers is reasonable or excessive pertains to whether the research is about developing theory or about working with facts within the framework of an already existing, accepted, and predominant theory. Thomas Kuhn, writing about research in the natural sciences in his classic book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1996), distinguishes between "normal science" and "revolutionary science." In normal science, not only has a theory already been developed, but there is often one theory that predominates and drives all research in the field; such research is not about developing new theory, but about the activity of articulating or refining the already accepted theory, the activity of determining significant facts within the framework of the theory, and the activity of matching facts with the theory. In revolutionary science, the predominant theory is in the process of being overthrown, and new theory is being developed to succeed it. In these views on the natural sciences, Kuhn notes that the vast majority of research activity is normal science, not revolutionary science. However, in a field such as information systems, which lies at the intersection of the interactions between the social and the technological, the vast majority of the research is about developing needed theory, not simply working with facts within the framework of an existing, accepted, and predominant theory.

The review process for information systems research, therefore, is considerably more complicated than determining whether some newly discovered facts are reported correctly or whether such facts fit within an already existing, accepted, and predominant theory. Instead, it also requires assessing the merits of the theory being developed—a task more demanding than the verification of facts within the framework of an already existing, accepted, and predominant theory. In my experience as a senior editor, I have often witnessed the review process provide the occasion for the associate editor and reviewers to shed their ascribed roles as evaluators and transform themselves into collaborators with the authors of the submitted research paper. The associate editor, reviewers, and authors then engage themselves in working together to develop a theory over the course of several revise-and-resubmit revision cycles of the review process. The result is not simply a theory whose merits the reviewers have approved, but a theory that was largely not even present in the first version of the paper submitted to the review process. Therefore, where a research paper is about developing theory in contrast to reporting facts, a review process requiring several iterations and lasting quite longer than just a month is not only reasonable, but required. The point is that significant theory is developed in the review process. Significant research is not published overnight.

I would like to make three additional points.

First, a technology perspective has a place in an information systems journal, where it exists in an overall balance with managerial and organizational perspectives. Maintaining and safeguarding such a balance—for instance, by blending the different perspectives under a heading of "the management of information technology" or "the use of information technology for managerial and organizational purposes"—can be important not only for distinguishing the sort of research that we do, but also for displaying collegiality and respect to those whose favored perspective is different from our own. Furthermore, such a balance is important for putting the meaning of "systems" back into the term, "information systems." An information system includes both a technological subsystem and a social subsystem. In the study of an information system, neither the social subsystem nor the technological subsystem can be studied in isolation. Given their interactive and transformational effects on one another, the technological subsystem and the social subsystem both need to be accounted for.

Second, *MIS Quarterly* is but one possible outlet for publishing one's research. A diversity of outlets can surely be recognized. There is no question that journals with editorial objectives different from *MIS Quarterly*'s may choose to publish research focusing on technology itself. There is a place for journals that publish, in rapid fashion, papers whose topics and findings run the risk of becoming outdated quickly. A healthy environment is diverse; it would not be desirable for every publication outlet to have the same editorial objectives.

Third, for a special issue or themed issue of *MIS Quarterly* a lead time of a year or two can also sometimes be appropriate for the reason that this helps to encourage people to undertake (i.e., start) research in a new area and, in this way, serves to "push" the field in a new, needed direction. It can also promote inclusiveness because scholars who are not yet involved in this area would receive plenty of notice and time to get involved and to develop a paper for the issue (thus potentially dampening the competitive advantage of those already in the area).

A "lead time" of a year or even two for a paper to be published in a journal is not brief, but if the time is spent wisely by the people involved (the authors, the reviewers, and the editors), the result can be articles with enduring practice-oriented and theory-oriented lessons about information technology—lessons that would still be relevant and applicable even when the specific technologies studied have themselves been superseded by newer technologies.

References

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DeSanctis, G. "Shifting Foundations in Group Support Systems Research," in *Group Support Systems: New Perspectives*, L. Jessup and J. Valacich (eds.), 1993, pp. 97–111.

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Kuhn, T. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (3rd Ed.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1996.

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Clarification in Editorial Policy on Instrument-Development Submissions ■

The senior editors and I have decided that MIS Quarterly will no longer accept submissions that are primarily about the development, reliability, or validity of instruments. This includes manuscripts on instrument-development work where the objective is primarily about developing a valid and reliable instrument for a construct that currently is not firmly grounded in existing theory used in information systems research.

Not all manuscripts involving instrument development are being ruled out. The following are overlapping categories in which an appropriate submission, involving instrument development, could fall.

1. The manuscript, although mainly oriented toward measurement issues, also does a good job of developing a construct. In making a significant contribution to theory in this way, the manuscript could be an appropriate submission.

2. The manuscript describes work that seeks to develop a valid and reliable instrument for a construct that is central to a well-established theory used in information systems research and for which no valid and reliable instrument currently exists.

3. The manuscript describes work that shows how to improve, quite substantively, the validity and reliability of measures of a construct that is well established in the information systems field. The focus here is on substantive improvements over existing instruments. The authors might be proposing a new instrument that is demonstrably better than existing instruments or modifications to existing instruments that will improve their validity and reliability considerably.

4. The authors may be building a new theory about some type of information systems phenomena, and their instrument-development work forms part of their efforts to test the theory. Thus, the instrument-development work is simply part of the larger work to build and test theory.

MIS Quarterly also discourages and does not participate in the practice in which authors present the development of an instrument in one manuscript and then submit another manuscript that uses the instrument to test a research model with the same data set.

Clarification in Editorial Policy on Submissions of Conference Papers ■

The senior editors and I encourage authors to engage in the practice, whenever possible, of presenting their research papers at conferences prior to submitting them to MIS Quarterly. The feedback that an author receives from a conference presentation can provide the basis for significantly improving the quality of the paper. When an author subsequently submits such a paper for possible publication in MIS Quarterly, the author must mention in his or her cover letter (or cover e-mail) that the paper was previously presented at a conference. It is expected that the version submitted to MIS Quarterly be substantially revised to incorporate feedback from the conference presentation and the author's updated analysis.

In the situation where the paper was published in the conference proceedings and copyrighted by the conference or another organization, the author (1) must inform MIS Quarterly about this at the time that the author is submitting the manuscript to the Quarterly and (2) must obtain, from the holder of the copyright, permission for MIS Quarterly to publish a version of the paper whose wording and content may overlap in portions with those of the version published in the conference proceedings. It is the author's reponsibility, not MIS Quarterly's, to gain the release from the original copyright holder for the potential

MIS Quarterly publication. The necessity for this procedure is that, obviously, *MIS Quarterly* may not freely publish work that has already been copyrighted elsewhere. Note that, for some conference proceedings (such as for the International Conference on Information Systems), the author holds the copyright, so no problem arises in the first place.

Changes in the Editorial Board ▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬▬

Beginning in July of this year, the following four scholars commenced three-year terms as associate members of the Editorial Board: Dale Goodhue (University of Georgia), Poppy McLeod (Case Western Reserve University), Chris Sauer (Oxford University), and Veda Storey (Georgia State University). They have replaced the following, whose terms as associate editors have expired: Ellen Hufnagel (University of South Florida), Magid Igbaria (Claremont Graduate School), Tor Larsen (Norwegian School of Management), and Mark Silver (New York University). The design editors' (Munir Mandviwalla of Temple University and Michael Parks of the University of Houston) terms have also expired. I thank the four retiring associate editors and the two design editors for their excellent work and sacrifices of time and effort. Potential authors may take advantage of the composition of the Editorial Board by nominating the associate editors whom they prefer and by sending their manuscript directly to the senior editor of their choice. Additional details about submitting a manuscript are available at http://www.misq.org/roadmap/standards.html.

Allen S. Lee
Editor-In-Chief

Corrections

Table 6 of the paper "Arrangements for Information Technology Governance: A Theory of Multiple Contingencies," by V. Sambamurthy and Robert Zmud, published in the June 1999 issue, contained errors due to typesetting. The correct table is printed on the following page. We regret the errors.